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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Pax Romana, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Introduction

1. The global economic and financial crisis has made an impact and continues to make an impact on the lives of people around the world. It has been a major setback to efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth. The crisis has caused more people than ever to be living in poverty. The crisis has also proven that youth are a very vulnerable group. Now more than ever the world needs strong coordination of efforts and goodwill, the empowerment of civil society organizations and global solidarity. With regard to youth and the eradication of poverty, Pax Romana finds that the pressing issues are education, employment and participation.

Education

2. The crisis has created a situation where there is an increase in those seeking admission to institutions of higher learning. Some universities have been spared by public budgeting that was already secured prior to the crisis. However, in the upcoming set of budget cycles, we can predict that funding will be reduced even though there is an increase in demand. For those who live in countries where higher education is either partially or entirely subsidized by the State, Governments and institutions will be faced with several choices: limit the number of people gaining admission; allow for an increase in the number of people gaining admission while reducing subsidies to students; or provide a lower-quality education to the same number of students.

3. Reducing subsidies to students in higher education is a risky move because it directly affects the future and development of a country. A reduction in subsidies and increasing enrolment will likely place the burden on individual students. Maintaining allocations to universities at the present level is likely to push institutions further into commercial activities to cover budget shortfalls, such as an increase in fees. This situation gives a disproportionate advantage and easier access to education to wealthier students. Students who are economically challenged are automatically disadvantaged, which defeats the efforts made to achieve the Education for All goals.

4. The process of eradicating poverty is in dire need of highly qualified human capital to drive a country's economic and social development. An investment in education for only a few is a recipe for development that does not respect the dignity and potential of all people. Education should not be reserved only for those who have deep pockets. An investment in education for all is an investment in eradicating poverty.

Youth unemployment

5. According to *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, published by the International Labour Organization in 2010, youth unemployment rates are more sensitive to the crisis than the rates of adults. The rate of youth unemployment

increased from 11.9 per cent in 2007 to 13.0 per cent in 2009. Over 81 million young people are without jobs and are unable to earn a decent living.

6. Youth non-governmental organizations understand well that young people are essential to economic development. For this reason youth-led organizations such as Pax Romana focus on the development of the person as a means of eradicating poverty.

7. A person who actively participates in society from an early age has what is necessary to eradicate poverty. Young people who are active in youth clubs and associations and in community-based and faith-based organizations develop a set of transferable skills which are needed for decent employment. Projects which focus on the development of the young person help to empower youth with transferable skills. These sets of skills are acquired during activities in life such as participation in youth clubs and associations and in community-based and faith-based organizations, to name a few.

8. With projects that engage young people, Pax Romana assists in the formation of broad skill areas such as communications, research and planning, human relations, organization and management, and leadership. Skills in these areas enable young people to gain employment and earn a decent wage.

9. Owing to the economic crisis, Governments and other sources of funding have disinvested in youth and youth organizations. Actions such as these are detrimental to eradicating poverty. This trend needs to be reversed.

Youth participation

10. When given the opportunity to play an enhanced role in governance and other social sectors, youth can help to alleviate pressing social problems like unemployment and crime. When youth are allowed to blossom into full members of society at an early age, they learn to value their place in their individual communities and work to make improvements in any way they can. By allowing young people to take a more active role in the decision-making processes vital to society, youth can play a much more valuable role at all levels of governance and society.

11. Young people must be pulled from the margins and placed in a more central position in society. If the Government begins to value youth, other sectors of society will soon follow suit. Once the State recognizes the great value of young people, then business leaders, civil society leaders, entrepreneurs and many other social actors will utilize youth for constructive projects that bring about social and economic growth.

12. In order to achieve youth participation, negative stereotypes surrounding youth must be battled. Adults have forgotten about the value of youth to society. As the Youth Employment Network wrote in its report *Joining Forces with Young People: A Practical Guide to Collaboration for Youth Employment*: "Rather than being viewed as a problem or risk to be contained or solved, youth should be recognised as social actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive solutions to societal issues that directly affect them. Policy makers should not only invite young people into policy discussions but also listen and act upon their advice."[1]

[1] Available from www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/downloads/yen_youth_guide_en.pdf.

13. The Secretary-General of the United Nations said that youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels. It is especially important that young people be given the opportunity to play a role in politics and policymaking at all levels.

Recommendations

14. In conclusion, Pax Romana makes the recommendations set out below.

15. The focus to educate must not fall victim to the economic and financial crisis. Instead of cutting budgets and spending on education, this is the opportune moment to invest more in education. Long-term vision rather than immediate results will help to eradicate poverty. Every effort should be made to prevent the marginalization of the poor with respect to access to and success in higher education.

16. A small percentage of national defence budgets should be used to fund youth development projects. All over the world, Governments have allowed military spending to grow at the expense of necessary social development. If Member States dedicate even 1 per cent of current military spending to fund youth grass-roots initiatives, greater economic and social development can be achieved. Young people in every country have the capacity to bring positive change to their communities and the world. With a little bit of financial assistance from their Governments, youth everywhere can be given the opportunity to do truly wonderful work.

17. Countries should ensure that young people have a voice in national debates, especially in the development of and decision-making on domestic policies. Participating in this process allows young people to take ownership of their future. The establishment of national youth councils and the assurance of their governance independent from the Government would ensure that the voice of even the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are expressed.

18. States should mobilize the necessary resources to ensure that youth delegates are able to participate in the activities of the United Nations and its agencies. By participating at the United Nations youth leaders can rally support for activities that promote the goals of the International Year of Youth, which calls for dialogue and mutual understanding.

19. The technical skills of young people should be harnessed and opportunities for them expanded in emerging fields like clean energy and sustainable development. Their knowledge can help achieve advances in cutting-edge industries that can improve the economy, provide countless jobs and protect the environment from the destructive powers of unfettered human development.

20. Social cohesion should be encouraged and youth used as the vehicle to promote social stability and peace. This is especially critical in pluralistic societies. Once again, the purpose of the International Year of Youth is to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. Youth can be at the forefront of any efforts to alleviate civil strife. Young people already have a great deal of experience in countries throughout the world in working with those who are different from them. As a result, youth have the capacity to bring the many groups that may exist in a single society together for the sake of greater economic and social development.